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Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
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~ Anodyne Site Update! ~ Santa's Site Hacked! ~ MySpace Is Targeted!
~ Record Levels of Spam! ~ Bushnell Opens uWink! ~ New Tech Laws Eyed!
~ Wiki Search Is Planned ~ The Top 10 of 2006! ~ Spammers Beat Tools!

-* Apple Has Stock Option Probe *-
-* Better Photo Search Helps Privacy? *-
-* Video Game Console Shortage Lingers Into 07 *-

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->From the Editor's Keyboard
"~~~~~"

"Saying it like it is!"

Well, here we are, our last issue for this current year. Another new year is upon us once again. Amazing how this keeps happening every year! <grin> There's been a lot that has happened over the past year; I wouldn't even know where to begin. For me personally, 2006 was a combination of good and bad. I left a job with an organization I was with for 30 years. Now that was a tough thing to do, but something I felt (and still do) that had to be done. But, it happened at a time when I could enjoy myself, as well as get a lot of work done around my home that I would otherwise not have the time or energy to do. I was able to really enjoy the simple things in life for a change. What was that old saying, "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy"? No, it makes an unhappy Jack! I always knew that there had to be a good balance between working and personal life, but these days, many people focus too much of their energy trying to get ahead, and they forget to enjoy life - or, don't have the time to do so. And, I was one of those people - I didn't have the time or energy to really take advantage of my "down" time. My weekends were spent trying to cram everything that I had to do over the past week. Too much. It was a lesson that I learned due to difficult choices, but one I do not regret.

Another "lesson learned" this past year pertains to family. I was never a big family-type person. I always took family for granted. But, over the years, I've tried to move away from that attitude. With a number of family issues this past year, I've got closer to my father and brother, even though there's a good distance (literally) between us; and, there are a lot of external problems going on. Not a perfect relationship to be certain, but an improvement.

So, what will the new year bring for us? Who knows! Like most of us, I'm hoping that the new year brings happiness and success at whatever I do. I always hope that a new year brings better things than the previous year, or years. This year is no different. I try to be a little more realistic than past years. After all, I stopped wishing for a better Atari computer years ago, and faced certain facts of life! I moved on, while still holding on to a little nostalgia with my existing Atari machines. I also promised myself to do some of the things that I always wanted to do, but really never had the time. I'll play more golf next year, do more around the house, continue writing that mystery novel I always wanted to do, enjoy more quality time with my wife and dogs, and much more, I hope!

I hope that the new year brings new hopes and goals for all of you, and more successes. And please, start the new year off responsibly. To all of

you, we here at A-ONE wish you a very Happy New Year!

Until next time...

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Anodyne Software Web Site Update

The Anodyne Software web site has been updated, as follows:

ExtenDOS 4 version 4.05 is now available. It fixes problems in CD.BOS, CDaudio and ExtInfo, and increases compatibility with some drives with buggy firmware. A patch to update previous versions to version 4.05 is available from the web page at:

<http://www.anodynesoftware.com/e4/updates.htm>

A note has been added concerning a minor problem with CDwriter; see the CD Writer Suite web page at:

<http://www.anodynesoftware.com/cdws4/support.htm>

If you are in the habit of accessing the alternate web site rather than the main one, please note that the alternate has been moved to:

<http://www.magma.ca/~anodyne>

Roger Burrows

Atari Founder Serves Games, Food and Possibly Love

Lovelorn video gamers who are better with consoles than conversation, have a new venue - a restaurant where each table has touchscreens for ordering food and for playing a variety of social games.

Entrepreneur Nolan Bushnell, founder of the original Atari game company and the children's U.S. restaurant franchise Chuck E. Cheese, has set up uWink in a shopping mall in Woodland Hills, a Los Angeles suburb, to attract an adult dating set.

"This isn't for 18-year-old testosterone junkies who are into playing 'Halo'," Bushnell said, referring to a Microsoft Corp.'s alien shoot-up game.

Bushnell, a life-long gamer and uWink's master game designer, cemented his place in video game history three decades ago when he introduced Atari's first product - the now legendary table tennis game "Pong" - to the world. He sold Atari in 1976, four years after its was launched.

Bushnell's new target market is 21 to 35 year old women, although he also hopes to appeal to school kids and families during the day.

"If you've got a restaurant full of women, you're automatically going to attract men," he said.

The new restaurant, which Bushnell wants to franchise, is steeped in LA cool - with dark wood, sleek surfaces, videos projected onto walls, bistro fare and sophisticated adult cocktails.

It is a far cry from his first restaurant venture, Chuck E. Cheese, where kids go for pizza, arcade games and birthday cake, although the central theme - gaming - is the same. Nolan, who took Chuck E. Cheese public and left the company in 1983, has already established uWink as a public company that trades under the ticker UWNK.

Each table at uWink has a pair of touchscreens for ordering food and playing conversation-fueling trivia games covering everything from entertainment to politics and sports.

The library at uWink, which opened in October this year, already has more than two years of game content, including more than 45,000 questions that update weekly.

But Bushnell wants mingling to be the name of the game at uWink, which hosts "room games" where every table in the restaurant can compete simultaneously. The next level of play, to be introduced soon, is table-to-table competition. Players can stand at so-called party tables and play a fast-paced, six-player game called "Ping" - a tribute to "Pong."

Bushnell said one of his goals is to take the social risk out of buying a stranger a drink.

"The only thing we're not going to do is determine who is hot and who's isn't," he joked, referring to hotornot.com, an online dating site where people rate each other's looks.

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PEOPLE ARE TALKING
compiled by Joe Mirando
joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho, friends and neighbors. Gonna talk about a couple of things before we get to the messages this week.

First, celebrate responsibly this weekend. Remember: There are plenty of idiots on the road... they don't need one more.

Second, Gerald R. Ford. Oh, Jerry, Jerry, Jerry. He's one of two presidents in my lifetime who I feel got a bum wrap for doing what needed to be done. At the time, I would have liked nothing better than to see Nixon hung up on the flagpole on the Capitol building. But Ford knew that we needed to move forward and get on with the business of being The United States.

Ford was not only a republican, he was a GOLFER! Strike TWO! [grin]

I was a bit annoyed the other night when I heard someone on television refer to Ford as 'simple'. No, folks, he wasn't simple. He was straight-forward.... honest, even. He held the reigns of government, albeit for a short time, during the end (and an unsuccessful end at that) of a war, the beginning of an energy crisis, and the middle of an economic crisis. 'Simple' is not a word that I'd use to describe him.

Then came Chevy Chase. The first time he parodied Ford, I thought it was one of the worst sketched I'd ever seen on SNL... today it'd probably be about middle-of-the-road... Chase didn't look like Ford, didn't TRY to look like Ford, and didn't sound anything like Ford. I felt cheated. He could have just as easily been spoofing Johnny Carson or Ho Chi Min or Chaka Zulu.

In my eyes, it was a cheap shot... and I'm not one to be above lampooning public figures. I'm glad that Chevy went on to show some real talent.

Okay, enough of that. Third thing on my list: Cloned food.

This past week, the FDA decided that cloned food won't need special labeling. I'm okay with that, I guess. Actually, I'm wondering what the advantage to cloned food would have. Clones are expensive!

We're not talking about genetically engineered food items here. We're already eating genetically engineered foods daily. Bigger carrots, prettier ears of corn, disease-resistant tomatoes, bigger, meatier cattle, and things like that represent genetic engineering. Clones are (supposedly) carbon copies. What advantage is there in making one cow start out exactly like another at this incredible cost? Email the FDA today (like I did) and ask them what possible advantage there is to this... and to making this decision now. Perhaps they're thinking about cloning Gerald Ford in preparation for pardoning our current White House resident?

I guess my real question would be, "what do those corporate drones have up their sleeves for a decade from now?"

Well, enough of this. Let's get to the news, hints tips and info from the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup
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Djordje Vukovic asks about displaying directory sizes:

"What would be the politically correct way to treat the sizes of directory objects that can be retrieved in some filesystems? Should they be displayed and counted/summed or should they be ignored?

I am not referring to the summary sizes of items -in- a directory, but to the sizes of the objects with the directory attributes and information themselves.

Original Atari desktop ignores them but some desktops and iirc some

Video Game Console Shortage Could Linger Into '07

Shoppers are standing in lines to snap up Sony Corp's PlayStation 3 and Nintendo Co. Ltd.'s Wii video game consoles as they become available, and some analysts do not expect shortages to ease until March or later.

Shoppers are finding lots of PlayStation 2s and Microsoft Xbox 360s, expected to do well as substitutes for the newest machines that are in short supply.

One employee at a Target store said the retailer issues a memo a couple of days in advance of Wii and PS3 shipments and passes the information on to shoppers, who sometimes stand in line to secure their booty.

As he spoke, shoppers snapped up PlayStation Portables and Apple Computer Inc. iPods.

American Technology Research analyst Paul-Jon McNealy said that since Sony shipment numbers include units in transit or in warehouses, the company's target of 1 million could translate to 600,000 to 800,000 units at retail by year end.

McNealy said investors and game makers tempered their forecasts for the PS3s since initial numbers fell short. He added that the PS3 will likely remain scarce through the June quarter.

"They have to launch in Europe, and they're stretched," said McNealy. Wii shortages could ease in the March quarter, he said.

Workers at a dozen Southern California stores, including Best Buy, GameStop and Target outlets, said PS3 shipments were small and sporadic this shopping season, ranging from as few as 1 or 2 to 25, and that shoppers snapped up consoles as they arrived.

"We get 1 or 2 every week to week and a half," said a weary Los Angeles GameStop employee.

Nintendo's Wii was selling out fast but reaching stores in greater numbers than the PS3, store clerks said.

The \$250 Wii, known for its motion-sensitive controller that can be swung like a tennis racquet or a sword, and the high-end \$600 PS3 both launched in the United States in mid-November and take on the year-old Microsoft Xbox 360 in the new generation video game console battle.

Sony's PS2, which has sold more than 106 million units globally, is expected to be a top seller this season.

Toys "R" Us said its 587 U.S. stores expected more than 6,000 PS3s, thousands of Wiis and over 30,000 Microsoft Corp. Xbox 360s in the week leading up to Christmas.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Santa's Web Site Hacked

With Christmas fast approaching, Santa Claus reached out for a little help from Stopbadware.org this week.

The consumer advocacy group said it was approached by an Incline Village, Nevada, man who has legally changed his name to Santa Claus, who asked them to help figure out why his Web site was being flagged by Google's Web site filters.

It turned out that Santa's Web site, Santaslink.net had been hacked.

Claus is a children's advocate who has travelled across the U.S. meeting with legislators, according to his Web site. He also makes seasonal appearances as Saint Nick.

"He had consulted local experts, which we can only assume were elves, but they were unable to identify anything wrong with his site," wrote StopBadware.org Developer Jason Callina, in a Thursday blog posting.

"Nestled all snug in the bottom of his homepage was a nice little bit of code containing a badware link," he added.

The problem was soon resolved "and the workshop is once again a safe place," Callina said.

Stopbadware.org was founded earlier this year, with funding from Google, Lenovo and Sun Microsystems as a community watchdog organization to help protect consumers from malicious software like spyware and viruses.

Callina said he's learned something from the Santa Claus experience. "The moral of the story is that the Grinches who are looking to spread their unsafe software are willing to hack even Santa's Web site."

Wiki Search Planned

The founder of Wikipedia, the user-edited online encyclopedia, is developing a Wiki-based search engine to compete with established commercial search engines from Google and Yahoo.

Jimmy Wales announced plans to develop the search engine, to be named "Wikiasari," or "Wikia," for short, in a December 23 online posting.

The Wikimedia Foundation of St. Petersburg, Florida, which manages the Web site Wikipedia.com, emphasizes that the search engine project is not associated with the foundation.

Wales said that current search engine technology, using complex algorithms to complete searches, is "broken."

"It is broken for the same reason that proprietary software is always broken: lack of freedom, lack of community, lack of accountability (and) lack of transparency. Here, we will change all that," wrote at the site, search.wikia.com.

Wales promotes Wikia as "a new kind of search engine, which relies on human intelligence to do what algorithms cannot." He invited members of the Wiki community to help design the Wikia search engine, which he described as "an open-source alternative for Web search."

He cited open source search projects as Nutch and Lucene as related efforts that can help in the development of Wikia.

Wikipedia is maintained with donations from users. The foundation filed its first financial statement November 21, listing just over \$1 million in assets for the year ended June 30.

While Wikipedia began mostly as a resource on technology issues, it has expanded to cover more general topics. And although its populist mission is to let users edit content, it has had to correct some embarrassing inaccuracies.

Most notably, the site let stand for four months in 2005 a posting identifying newspaper publisher John Seigenthaler Sr. as involved in the assassinations of President John F. and Sen. Robert F. Kennedy in the 1960s. It removed the posting only after Seigenthaler repeatedly objected.

Apple Probed On Stock Options

Federal prosecutors are probing whether former Apple Computer Inc. officials forged documents to maximize executives' profits from stock options, according to a legal publication that also reported CEO Steve Jobs has hired his own lawyers to represent him in the investigation.

Shares of the iPod and Macintosh computer maker went on a roller-coaster ride in trading Wednesday, falling almost 5 percent before rebounding by midday.

In a morning note, UBS Investment Research Analyst Ben Reitzes called investors' fears "overblown."

The Recorder, a San Francisco-based publication owned by American Lawyer Media, reported late Tuesday that federal prosecutors are looking into forged documents at Apple related to administering stock options. The report cited people with knowledge of the case who requested anonymity because the case is the subject of criminal and civil government investigations.

Apple spokesman Steve Dowling said the company is providing the Securities and Exchange Commission with the results of its internal investigation into its stock options granting practices, but had no further comment Wednesday.

The publication also reported that Jobs has hired his own outside counsel separate from the company's legal team.

"Investors seem to be reacting to the mention of Steve Jobs," Reitzes said in his note. "We believe it could make sense to obtain counsel given his immense personal fortune and influence."

Apple is one of nearly 200 companies that have disclosed SEC, DOJ or internal investigations for potential backdating of stock options. Backdating refers to retroactively pegging the strike price of an option to a day when the stock traded cheaply. Options with low strike prices are more valuable to their owner because they are less expensive to exercise.

In October, Apple said the internal investigation raised concerns about how two former officers recorded and accounted for stock options. Citing people with knowledge of the investigation, The Recorder also reported those two former officers were General Counsel Nancy Heinen and Chief Financial Officer Fred Anderson.

On Dec. 15, Apple said it was delaying filing its annual report with the Securities and Exchange Commission due to its ongoing investigation into stock option grants. In a filing with the SEC, the company said it needs to restate historical financial statements to record charges for compensation related to past grants. As a result, Apple was unable to file its 10-K Form for the fiscal year ended Sept. 30 by the required filing date of Dec. 14.

Apple expects to file its annual report and its quarterly report for the period ending July 1 by Friday.

'Safe' Web Seal Requires Rigorous Checks

Beginning next month, version 7 of Microsoft Corp.'s Internet Explorer browser will start flagging certain e-commerce and banking sites as green for "safe." The browser will look for an extended-validation certificate issued by any number of vendors.

To qualify, vendors such as VeriSign Inc. and Comodo will be required to make extensive checks before approving such certificates. They also will have to undergo independent auditing through WebTrust, a service run by trade groups for certified public accountants.

Under the latest, 65-page draft guidelines, verification requirements include:

- * Legal existence and identity. The certificate vendor must make sure that the business is legally recognized and that the formal name matches government records, through databases and other means. The vendor also must verify any alternative operating names that differ from the legal name.

- * Physical existence. The vendor must check government records to make sure addresses in those records and in the certificate application match. When there is no match, a site visit is required, documenting such things as whether a permanent sign is present and whether the office is more than a mailbox. Photos are required showing the site's exterior and the

interior reception area or workspace.

* Telephone number. The vendor must verify that the phone number provided is the primary one for the business, using such techniques as calling it directly and checking phone directory listings. In some cases, the vendor must make sure the main phone number is not a mobile phone.

* Domain name. To ensure the business owns and controls the domain name, the vendor must use techniques such as checking registration records, known as the Whois database, and asking the company to make an agreed-upon change to the Web site under that domain name.

* Individual's authorization. The vendor must verify that the individual requesting the certificate works for the company, for instance, by contacting its human resources department. The vendor must also verify the individual's authority to make the request, generally by obtaining written documentation. For some verifications, exemptions are permitted with a letter from a lawyer, notary or accountant. The guidelines include procedures for verifying authenticity.

Businesses in existence for less than three years may be required to also produce evidence they have a valid bank account. Additional checks are required for banks and other companies deemed to be high-risk targets for scams.

Because many of the steps rely upon government filings, general partnerships, unincorporated associations, sole proprietorships and individuals are currently barred from getting these certificates.

For that reason, a consortium of certificate vendors and browser makers rejected the draft in November, although Microsoft and some vendors believe the standards are good enough to proceed anyhow.

Better Photo Search Could Reduce Privacy

A Swedish startup is combining software and humans to help make photos and other images more easily searchable online, raising privacy concerns as the technology eases the tracking of people across Web sites.

Traditionally, search engines analyze text surrounding an image on a Web site. So a search for "Bill Gates" might produce a photograph captioned with the name of the Microsoft Corp. chairman. But a search for a reporter's name might produce that same photograph if it had accompanied an article he had written.

Polar Rose AB is bringing facial-recognition technology to the mix. Its software scans everyday images for about 90 different attributes. If the software finds a match with images in a database, it concludes the two photos are of the same person.

The company, among many startups seeking to improve image search, believes its technology is noteworthy because it creates 3-D renditions of faces in images, allowing the computer to account for slight variations in angles and lighting. Nikolaj Nyholm, the company's chief executive, said testing has shown up to 95 percent reliability with sets of 10,000 photos. But he said that as the collection grows, there are millions, perhaps billions, of photographs on the Internet, reliability diminishes because, well,

many people simply look alike.

That's where humans come in. In early 2007, the company will distribute free plug-ins for Microsoft's Internet Explorer and Mozilla's Firefox browsers.

People who post or view photos could add information such as names; there might be the occasional error, but enough people filling in the correct answer would make that rise to the top.

The idea is to label every face, even ones in the background, whether posted on a Web journal, a photo-sharing site like Yahoo Inc.'s Flickr or a social-networking hangout like News Corp.'s MySpace. The service won't index images on personal computers or password-protected sites.

Polar Rose plans to sell ads and premium services but won't charge for the basic use of its plug-ins or search engine, which is still in a "beta" test phase. But there's still a cost: privacy.

Imagine yourself minding your own business when a tourist at Times Square snaps a picture with you walking in the background and posts it on a public site. Using a search engine like Polar Rose, your boss could easily find out you were out and about on a day you had called in sick.

Police, stalkers and spouses also could use the technology to track where people have been, for example, if someone has attended anti-war protests in multiple cities.

"I don't think we have all the answers quite yet," Nyholm said, adding that people went through similar debates years ago when search engines began indexing text.

"A lot of pictures have been published, and privacy has been assumed due to obscurity," he said. "This will highlight the fact that there is no such thing as privacy by obscurity."

It's not clear how well the service will work. Facial-recognition technology isn't error-free, people get tans; some occasionally wear sunglasses. And the human component will help only if a large number of people participate; many other human-assisted search engines have produced lackluster results.

Simon Davies, director of Privacy International, said that regardless of the service's effectiveness, technologies such as Polar Rose underscore the need for a global debate on whether to place limits on what search engines can index and to give individuals greater say.

Without such dialogue, he said, "these technologies will keep drilling into information to create search dimensions which are infinitely more powerful than we could ever imagine."

And he rejects Nyholm's contention that just because an image is accessible, it's fair game.

Whenever information becomes easier to find and access, "a whole raft of new privacy issues are always created," he said. "When people place their photographs on the Internet, they do not expect them to be searchable."

MySpace Users Big Targets for ID Thieves

MySpace devotee Kary Rogers was expecting to see a gut-busting video when a friend from the popular online hangout messaged him a link.

First, though, he was directed to a page where he was supposed to re-enter his password. Rogers realized that someone was trying to steal his information, and he didn't take the bait. At best, he would be spammed with junk e-mails; worse, the Web thief might steal his real-life identity.

"I immediately went back and changed my password," said Rogers, 29, a network analyst for Mississippi State University in Starkville, Miss.

MySpace bills itself as a "place for friends." Increasingly, it is also a place for unfriendly attacks from digital miscreants on the prowl, luring users to sexually explicit Web sites, clogging mailboxes with spam messages and playing on the trust users have when speaking to "friends" to obtain passwords that could lead to identity theft.

Managing the risks that come with rapid growth is an enormous challenge for MySpace, now part of Rupert Murdoch's News Corp. media conglomerate. The site can't afford to drive away users, who might defect to one of a growing number of alternative sites, or advertisers, who pay top dollar to reach the growing MySpace audience.

Last month, MySpace inched past Yahoo Inc. in U.S. page views, recording 38.7 billion, according to comScore Media Metrix.

A key reason behind the popularity is its ease. Simply by adding a few lines of computer code, users can create elaborate profiles and personalize them with photos, music and video. A host of communication tools makes it easy to send messages to one person or a whole list of friends, who number into the thousands for some of the more popular MySpace users.

Those same tools can be used by vandals to make it look like an innocent user has sent spam to the same long list of "friends."

Programmers are writing scripts that take advantage of specific features on MySpace, including "friend request," where one user asks to be added to another user's list of buddies.

One recent scam works this way: A spammer posts a number of phony profiles featuring pictures of cute women, often promising nude photos. A "friend request" with the woman's photo is sent to hundreds of users.

Once the fake profile loads, a blue screen descends, saying the profile is protected by the "MySpace Adult Content Viewer." Unsuspecting users who try to download the viewer instead get a worm that installs adware on their computers.

Social-networking sites make good targets because of the implicit level of trust users have when they're interacting with "friends."

"The ongoing interaction lowers your reservations and security barriers," said Marc Gaffan, an expert in online fraud and security at RSA, the security division of EMC Corp.

MySpace, which News Corp. bought last year for some \$580 million, has recognized the threat and is stepping up security efforts, said Hemanshu Nigam, its chief security officer.

The company is rapidly expanding its team of software engineers, lawyers and other experts who look for suspicious activity, educate users on how to prevent attacks and go after the worst offenders.

Under Nigam's direction, the company recently formed a Content Assurance Team. Employees post fake profiles on the site, pretending to be vulnerable teens or clueless adults. The profiles are designed to keep tabs on everything from sexual predators to spammers.

MySpace also is preparing to launch a more aggressive education campaign, urging users to take care and use tools that restrict the viewing of their profiles to only trusted sources.

When all else fails, the company is also files civil suits and is increasing cooperation with law enforcement officials.

"We're trying to take away the 'cool' factor of trying to attack us," Nigam said.

Nigam came to MySpace after stints as a federal prosecutor specializing in child pornography and computer crime cases. He also led security efforts at Microsoft Corp. and the Motion Picture Association of America.

MySpace hired him in May to strengthen security and safety efforts at the site and other Internet properties owned by Fox Interactive media.

"Security is a top priority because it's critical for our community of users and for our business partners," Nigam said. "If advertisers feel uncomfortable being on a site that is seen as not as secure, not as safe, then we lose revenue."

So far, no major damage has been done on the site, although some users, increasingly annoyed by the fake friends and messages, are seeking other social networking alternatives.

"I don't have this problem on Facebook," Rogers said, referring to another popular site.

The Internet has weathered several threats over the years, but as users move on, so do the attackers.

Writers of malicious software used to count primarily on e-mail recipients to click on attachments to spread their wares. As e-mail recipients got more savvy, the writers looked to automate the process by exploiting vulnerabilities in e-mail programs, browsers and the Windows operating system from Microsoft Corp.

As those security holes get closed, virus writers are looking elsewhere, including social-networking sites ? attractive in part because of their size.

"It's where the activity is and the attackers play the percentages," said David Cole, director of security response at Symantec Corp. "They go after the largest market share where there is the most activity."

Anti-spam Tool Ceases As Spammers Evolve

The Open Relay Database, a tool e-mail service providers used for years to help curb the spread of spam, is ceasing operations, a death partly attributable to its own success. It was 5.

For years, spammers exploited e-mail servers with open relays, those that accept mail from anywhere for relaying to anywhere else, to pass along their junk pitches.

Service providers responded by using lists like the ORDB to block all mail, including legitimate messages, passing through open-relay servers, in turn pressuring operators of such relays to accept outbound mail only from their own customers.

Mail-server software also has been shipping with the relays closed by default, such that open relays aren't as big of a threat today. These days, spammers instead use zombie computers, generally home computers taken over by viruses and other malicious software to relay spam such that messages appear to come from legitimate customers.

"ORDB was a holdover from the past era when open relays were a major vector for spam," said John Levine, co-author of "Fighting Spam for Dummies." "Now the vast majority of spam is sent by virus-controlled zombie computers. ... There's way more of them (than) there ever were open relays."

Lists that target zombies as well, such as one from the Spamhaus Project, have in recent times been more effective, Levine said.

The number of open relays listed at ORDB dropped in late 2004 and has largely leveled off at about 225,000 servers since then.

The Danish volunteers who ran ORDB ultimately decided to shut down the project rather than expand it to include zombies, something that would have taken a lot more work without adding much to resources already available from Spamhaus and elsewhere, said Andreas Plesner Jacobsen, one of the database's operators.

The decision was made a year ago, "but nobody got around to executing it," he said Wednesday.

Jacobsen added that so few rely solely on ORDB to fight spam these days that people shouldn't suddenly see more junk in their inboxes.

In a Dec. 18 farewell note, the database's operators said open-relay lists "are no longer the most effective way of preventing spam from entering your network as spammers have changed tactics in recent years, as have the anti-spam community."

Operators plan to shut down the Web site on Sunday.

Spam Slams Internet at Record Levels

An explosion of spam has security vendors salivating over potential sales

of filtering products this coming year, with levels of the insidious mail clogging inboxes expected to grow at unprecedented levels.

In the closing months of 2006, the volume of spam jumped enormously, according to e-mail filtering firm Postini, with an increase of 73 percent in just the three months leading up to December.

Spam now represents nearly 93 percent of all e-mail throughout the world - the highest level ever recorded by Postini - further driving the need for businesses to find solutions.

The type of spam being sent has also changed, said Dan Druker, spokesman for Postini. In 2004 only a tiny percentage of junk e-mail messages contained images in them. Now, said Druker, that figure has ballooned to 25 percent.

McAfee Avert Labs says that number is even higher, suggesting that up to 40 percent of all incoming mail is now image spam. A year ago image spam accounted for less than one percent of the total spam received, the company reports.

Although many spam filters are deployed by companies, few are able to successfully defend against spam that is comprised of an image rather than text.

"A lot of spam is in the form of images and HTML documents that are designed to get beyond the filters," said Druker.

"Because spammers are hijacking personal computers and stealing bandwidth to send an unlimited number of spam messages at virtually no cost, businesses can face an escalating series of expenses to ensure their email remains a viable and productive tool," Druker explained.

Although image spam is in the spotlight these days, it is spam coming through unexpected communications channels that has the potential to wreak the most havoc.

Postini said there has been a dramatic surge of instant messaging (IM) attacks in just one month (160 percent), with new IM threats expected to continue throughout the year.

Postini also saw a significant jump in "directory harvest" attacks, which attempt to steal e-mail addresses from corporate servers coupled with increased activity around the world.

Congress Eyes Tech Law

Some technology vendors and advocacy groups see new opportunities in Congress in 2007, with issues such as patent reform and data protection getting fresh life under a Democratic-controlled legislature.

Democrats took control of the Senate and the House of Representatives in November's election, and many technology advocates say they expect Democrats will focus on some issues on the backburner in the past Republican Congress.

Some tech vendors praised Republicans for their focus on free trade and Internet tax moratoriums, but others say the Republican Congress failed to act on several important issues.

"We're excited about the new Congress," said Jack Krumholtz, managing director of federal government affairs and associate general counsel at Microsoft. "We think there's an opportunity to get some things done."

Here's a list of tech-related issues likely to come up in Congress in 2007:

Data Breach Alerts

Advocacy groups such as the Center for Democracy and Technology (CDT) have long called for comprehensive legislation to protect personal privacy, including rules for organizations handling personal data and limits on government surveillance. In November 2005, after a rash of data breaches, Microsoft joined privacy advocates in urging legislation, including a baseline data protection standard and giving individuals control over how their personal data is used.

Krumholtz and Leslie Harris, CDT's executive director, both said they hope the Democratic Congress will take a new look at privacy legislation. In addition, Democrats are likely to investigate the Bush administration's surveillance programs, such as monitoring phone calls and Internet conversations, and its use of data mining to assess risks posed by individual travelers. "There has been basically no oversight," Harris said of the Republican Congress.

Part of comprehensive privacy legislation would be a data breach notification provision, Krumholtz added. After a series of high-profile data breaches in early 2005, members of Congress introduced about a dozen bills requiring organizations with data breaches to notify affected customers, but the issue was held up partly because several congressional committees claimed jurisdiction.

Cybersecurity vendors and many other tech companies will renew the call for data breach notification legislation in 2007. "Clearly, the data breach concerns have only gotten more acute over the last year," Krumholtz said.

Patent Reform

Many large tech companies, including Microsoft, Dell, and eBay, have long sought patent reform. Some of those companies have asked Congress to make it more difficult for so-called patent "trolls" to win huge patent awards or get injunctions, forcing large companies to shut down entire product lines because of one infringing component.

Tech companies complain about people who buy up patents just to collect license fees, but many small inventors own patents and don't have the means to bring the patented products to market.

But the Supreme Court may have pre-empted Congress on the issue of patent injunctions. In a May ruling, the court set aside a lower court decision to stop eBay from using the "buy it now" feature on its Web site because of a patent dispute. The Supreme Court ruled that a lower court must weigh several factors before granting a patent injunction, instead of granting near-automatic injunctions as in recent years.

After the Supreme Court action, Congress is likely to focus its attention

on the quality of patents granted, an issue that has wide industry support. Tech groups have pushed for more money for the Patent and Trademark Office and a post-patent review process as a way to challenge patents.

Best Protecting Property?

Some small inventors agree that better patent examinations are needed, but have objected to other proposals pushed by tech groups, including changing the way patents are awarded.

Many companies pushing for patent reform "are doing their best to eviscerate America's patent system to avoid the consequences of their politely put unauthorized use of inventors' property," said Ronald Riley, president of the Professional Inventors Alliance.

Large pharmaceutical firms also have fought patent reform, but Christopher Hankin, senior director of federal affairs at Sun Microsystems, said he expects the Democratic Congress will be less cozy with the pharmaceutical industry than many Republicans are.

"We could work these issues out," he said of the patent debates. "Unfortunately, we never got to the situation where the other side felt the need to negotiate."

Broadband Reform, Net Neutrality

Two committees spent many hours in 2006 working on broadband bills with the goal of encouraging broadband adoption and improving services offered. But Congress failed to agree on a final bill before adjourning in December, partly because of a contentious debate about net neutrality provisions that would prohibit broadband providers from giving preferential treatment to their own Web content and blocking or slowing competitors' content.

Then, in mid-December, the Federal Communications Commission voted to streamline the franchising process that broadband providers must go through to offer television over Internet Protocol, in competition with cable TV providers.

Franchising reform was one of the major drivers of the 2006 broadband bills, and after the FCC action, lawmakers may have less enthusiasm to tackle a wide-ranging broadband bill.

Officials from Verizon Communications, a major backer of franchise reform, say they will drop the issue in 2007, focusing instead on state legislation and on rule-making at the FCC.

But individual pieces of the broadband bills may still move forward. Net neutrality ended up as a largely partisan issue, with Democrats generally supporting a law, and some on their side will likely push the issue again. But it's still hotly debated, and Republicans in the Senate could use parliamentary rules to hold up a Net neutrality bill, just as Democrats held up the broadband bill in 2006, warned one Senate Republican staffer, speaking on background.

Tech Subsidies

Rules that make it easier for municipal governments to offer wireless broadband will be on the agenda. Representative Rick Boucher, a Virginia Democrat, said he will push for a law similar to municipal broadband proposals in the last broadband bill. Some broadband carriers have pushed

state legislatures to pass laws prohibiting municipal broadband services, but Boucher noted that many residents of his rural Virginia district have no access to cable or DSL service.

Municipal wireless has a "role to play where commercial operators don't see an opportunity," Boucher said.

Also likely will be attempts to revamp the Universal Service Fund (USF), a federal program that subsidizes telecom and Internet services in rural and poor areas. Part of the USF money goes to the E-Rate program, which helps wire schools and libraries, but has been marred by fraud and rigged bidding in recent years.

USF, which raises about \$7 billion a year, collects a tax on interstate telephone calls and cellular service, but as more phone traffic moves away from traditional long-distance plans, critics say a new source is needed. Most groups involved with USF agree the funding system is broken, but some lawmakers have called for the program to be abolished altogether.

Boucher in March cosponsored a bill that would include services such as Voice over IP (VoIP) as USF funding sources and allowing recipients of USF money to deploy broadband services. The measure went nowhere, partly because of Republican calls to abolish USF. Boucher said he's optimistic USF reform will get another look in the next Congress.

The Innovation Agenda

Many tech companies will continue to push for an increase in the cap on H-1B visas for high-skilled immigrant workers. Microsoft and other tech companies have asked for an increase in the cap from 65,000 workers a year to 115,000.

The 2007 cap was reached two months before the fiscal year started in October. A Senate bill introduced in March sought to raise the cap, but the H-1B proposal was stalled when a larger debate about legal and illegal immigration grew contentious. Microsoft has "thousands" of open technical positions, and a higher cap is needed, Krumholtz said.

Many tech companies include the H-1B program as part of a larger push often called the "innovation agenda." Leaders of both parties have talked up proposals to promote U.S. innovation, including more money for math and science education, more money for tech training programs and broadband availability for all U.S. residents.

But Republicans failed to act on many of those proposals, and new House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, a Democrat from San Francisco, didn't include the innovation agenda in her "first 100 hours" plan, even though she repeatedly called on Republicans to pass innovation items during the last two years.

"I'm not sure how much of a priority it will really be," Harrison said. "Plus, some of the Democrats seem to be sincerely interested in controlling spending. I suspect new programs... will be hard to pass next year for lack of money."

The Top 10 Tech Stories of 2006

Megadeals signaled realignment in the IT industry and foreshadowed the

Internet's multimedia future. A much-delayed Vista debuted amid speculation that it would be the last of the old-school, big-bang product launches. As software giants announced support for Linux, and manufacturers switched chip allegiances, the open-source and chip industries were thrown into turmoil. 2006 was a transition year, as IT giants positioned themselves for a new era of global competition in the post-PC era. Here, not necessarily in order of importance, are the IDG News Service's top news stories of the year.

HP Spy Scandal: Board, and Broad, Implications

A board feud at Hewlett-Packard hit the newspapers in September, leading to the resignation of Chairman Patricia Dunn. The board spat erupted over an investigation to see which board members leaked information - including arguments about the ouster of former Chief Executive Officer Carly Fiorina - to the press.

The company used "pretexting," where investigators pretend to be the people being investigated in order to access private information.

Criminal charges were filed against Dunn, legal counsel Kevin Hunsaker, and outside investigators. Users are unfazed: Under Mark Hurd, CEO and newly appointed chairman, HP has overtaken Dell as the leading PC maker and IBM as the biggest IT company in revenue terms. However, the scandal has broad implications. Congress may make pretexting a federal crime. Oversight of corporate governance is a rallying cry.

Microsoft Cuts a Deal With Novell: Embrace and Devour?

Microsoft's November deal with Linux distributor Novell created turmoil in the open-source world. Microsoft will offer sales and support for Novell's Suse Linux, work on interoperability, and indemnify Suse users and developers from potential Microsoft lawsuits against copyright infringement.

Industry insiders say that Microsoft is driving wedges into the open-source community, protecting only some users from legal reprisals. The open-source world had already been rocked in October, when Oracle's move to offer full support for Red Hat Linux had industry insiders worrying Red Hat's business model would suffer. Ultimately though, the software giants' embrace of Linux is a sign that no one can ignore open source. Microsoft CEO Steve Ballmer said the impetus for the agreement came from customers. Though that's an old line, there's no doubt that open source has truly come of age.

Alcatel-Lucent: M&A Mania Grows

The merger of Alcatel and Lucent Technologies, announced in April, formed a \$24 billion networking giant and signaled trends in global mergers and acquisitions.

The hookup was necessary to face down competition in growth areas of the mature enterprise market - such as Voice over IP - while Chinese manufacturers put pressure on the West on the low end.

2006 is expected to yield 3945 M&A deals, up from 3455 in 2005 and the highest number ever, according to investment firm Innovation Advisors. Globalization and changing demand are fueling M&A in networking, the Internet, the chip industry and enterprise software. 2006 examples include Advanced Micro Devices and ATI Technologies, Red Hat and JBoss, and EMC

and RSA Security.

Google-YouTube: Convergence 2.0

Google's ability to afford the \$1.65 billion price tag for its acquisition of YouTube, announced in October, underscored its status as the Internet's superstar revenue generator. The deal itself confirmed video's importance in the evolution of Web 2.0: the mashing together of user-generated content and multimedia applications.

"Anybody who wasn't interested in YouTube was either asleep or not being honest," said Jonathan Miller, who was deposed as AOL chairman after the Google-YouTube deal.

Competitors scrambled. Lycos launched a movie-streaming service mixing elements of social networking and online video, while movie studios and TV networks rushed to put video online. Legal issues between Internet sites and content producers need to be worked out, but one thing is for sure: Convergence of video and the Net has hit prime time.

AOL Search Data Release Fans Privacy Debate

AOL's July release of search log data on 658,000 subscribers, meant for research use, became a cause celebre in the privacy-rights debate. Coming amid reports of corporate data leaks and phishing scams, it was yet another reminder of the general insecurity of data. The AOL records contained sensitive information like Social Security numbers.

In September three people sued the company in what their lawyers claimed was the first such lawsuit seeking national class-action status. They asked the court to instruct AOL not to store users' Web search records. But the request is not likely to be granted. Law enforcement officials want service providers to retain user logs to aid investigations, and new data retention rules may be proposed. The ability of technology to store an ever-increasing amount of data will ensure continuing debate. Jurisdictional issues also come into play as the U.S. and Europe clash over different privacy standards.

When Batteries Attack: The Great Battery Recall of 2006

It was the biggest recall in the history of IT and consumer electronics. Sparked by reports that lithium-ion batteries could short circuit and catch fire, Dell in August recalled more than 4 million laptop batteries. The move was soon followed by manufacturers around the world including Apple Computer, Fujitsu, Hitachi, Lenovo, and Toshiba. More than 8 million batteries were recalled, leading to yet another black eye in an annus horribilis for Sony, the manufacturer of the faulty cells. The recall, startup costs for the delayed PlayStation 3 game console, and poor PlayStation Portable sales pushed Sony's operations into the red.

Mac on Intel: Chip Industry Realigns

Apple's January launch of the first Mac PCs running on Intel chips was historic.

For decades, Apple's insistence on going its own way has been its strength, and also its weakness: the company has traded seamlessly designed products for market share... at least, until the iPod came along. But Intel chips have breathed new life into the Mac line. A 30 percent jump in fiscal fourth-quarter Mac sales helped the company generate \$546 million

in profit and blow away analyst expectations. The company's profit margin is great: in their last reported quarters, Dell had more than 300 percent greater revenue than Apple, but only 24 percent greater profit.

Meanwhile, in a blow to Intel, Dell announced in May that it would for the first time use chips from Intel archival Advanced Micro Devices, in multiprocessor servers by the end of the year.

Patent Wars Singe BlackBerry

After the U.S. Supreme Court declined in January to hear Research In Motion's appeal in its patent battle with NTP, industry watchers started sounding the death knell for RIM's BlackBerry. A \$612.5 million March agreement between the companies, however, ensures that RIM will never have to worry about NTP patent claims again.

The case is emblematic of the disruptions caused by patent disputes, which often lead to near-automatic injunctions that prevent companies from selling products that allegedly infringe on patents--even before final patent rulings have been made. Many industry insiders found wisdom in the U.S. Supreme Court's May ruling that courts need to look at multiple factors instead of immediately awarding injunctions. The court sided with eBay in a patent infringement case brought by online auction company MercExchange. But patent wars continue: NTP sued Palm in November.

Vista Launches

After numerous delays, Microsoft in November launched Vista, along with Office 2007 and Exchange 2007.

Though Microsoft CEO Ballmer called it "the biggest launch in our company's history," it didn't have that feel. Consumer versions of Vista and Office won't be available until the New Year, thus missing the holiday buying season. The products are important: among many other things, the level of interoperability among them is greater than ever before. But the launch may go down in history for another reason: it could be the last of the traditional big products launches. With more people tapping into hosted applications, Google experimenting with Internet-based productivity applications, and users receiving a steady stream of product updates over the Web, big-bang launches may fade into the past.

Gates Steps Back... to Plunge Into Philanthropy

Bill Gates' June announcement that he will step out of his daily role at Microsoft in July 2008 was a milestone that comes at a transition time. While he will remain chairman, Gates will focus on philanthropy.

Microsoft was rarely if ever a first mover, as for example Apple has been. But by combining technical acumen and business brilliance, Gates embodied the quintessentially American entrepreneurial knack of seizing a great idea and commercializing it beyond people's wildest dreams. His deal to provide the operating system for the IBM PC in 1981 fueled the personal computing revolution. Over the next 25 years Gates led Microsoft to embrace the graphical interface and bring it to the masses, conquer the desktop market, and ultimately navigate the shoals of the Internet era. Microsoft faces further battles in the Internet age, against Google and other companies that will spring up.

Meanwhile the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation has assets of about \$30 billion. The world watches to see if Gates can revitalize philanthropy,

as he did computing.

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